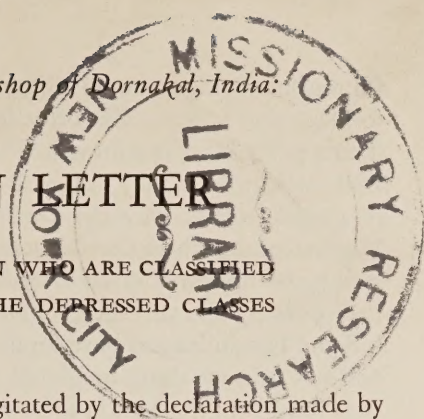


From: V. S. Azariah, Bishop of Dornakal, India:

AN OPEN LETTER

TO OUR COUNTRYMEN WHO ARE CLASSIFIED
AS BELONGING TO THE DEPRESSED CLASSES



Our dear fellow-countrymen,

The whole of India has been agitated by the declaration made by Dr. Ambedkar at Yeoli in Western India in the month of September, 1935. He said that all who are known as Depressed Classes should give up Hinduism and seek to join some other religion that will give them the fullest opportunities of developing themselves. Dr. Ambedkar said at that Conference that he was born a Hindu and he could not help it; but he had determined he will not die a Hindu—because it was in his power to change. He characterized Hinduism as a contagion; those who wished to escape the evil effects of this contagion, he said, must flee from it. He has recently published a book of about 150 pages in Hindi, in which he shows how Hinduism and caste have been the greatest obstacles to the advance of the depressed classes.

Dr. Ambedkar has been in Europe, England, and America; he spent several years in those countries for advanced study; he has many degrees conferred upon him by various universities. Owing to his depressed class origin, however, he was put to great inconveniences when he began work in the Baroda State and at Nasik in the Bombay Presidency. He says he cannot remember those days without tears: he had been so maliciously hounded from place to place. He is now practising in Bombay and is also the Principal of the Law College. Under this distinguished leader, thousands of those hitherto known as Untouchables in all parts of India have declared their willingness to follow Dr. Ambedkar and renounce Hinduism and join some other religion. To prove their sincerity, groups of these people in different places have burnt Hindu religious books and pulled down their village shrines.

Hindu leaders have naturally taken this as an attack on their religion and are advising the so-called Depressed Classes not to abandon

Hinduism. Some reformers urge that Hindu temples must be open to Depressed Classes. But orthodox people vehemently oppose this. Those pious Hindus who visited temples would of course no longer visit the temples if they were polluted by untouchables. It would be reasonable to ask why the Depressed Classes should now invade Hindu temples where they had never worshipped before and hurt the feelings of the devout orthodox people. Many Depressed Class leaders have publicly said that they do not want this.

Some Hindu leaders have argued that the Depressed Class people will not gain anything by giving up Hinduism, because only when they remain in the Hindu fold, will they be entitled to enjoy those political privileges and Government favors, which they now get as Depressed Classes. But Dr. Ambedkar asks: "What is the use of privileges when we are to be eternally called 'outcastes', 'untouchables' and have to live under this disgrace?" And he is right. Moreover, he is convinced, that Government is certainly not going to do any such injustice to the Depressed Classes simply because they choose to revolt against the position in which Hinduism has placed them. They cannot lose Government help, simply because they change their religion. Some others say that Hindus are reforming themselves, and there is much change now-a-days compared with former times, and that the Depressed Classes must wait in patience. Dr. Ambedkar says in reply that he has now waited for many years and nothing is really done; that the nature of Hinduism is such that nothing much can be done within it and the fact that some people have changed does not prove that his people's lot is going to be very different from the past. "One swallow does not make the summer," Dr. Ambedkar says. "Even today," he says, "Hindu barbers will not shave us in Bombay, and Muslim barbers dictate their own terms; no Hindu hotel will take us. Fifteen days ago a taxi driver who first agreed to take us to a place for Rs. 25 walked away with the money and no tonga walla will carry us."

In a conference held in Lucknow on May 23rd and 24th, 1936, the All India Depressed Classes Conference passed this Resolution: "This conference expresses its full confidence in Dr. Ambedkar. It also supports the resolution passed at the Yeoli Conference declaring in favour of a change of religion."

This conference also passed a resolution that while the Depressed Classes for the sake of their salvation should not remain within the

Hindu fold, they should not at once embrace any religion until this is settled at another conference next year.

But the question must be raised: is it possible for sixty million people to remain even for one year without any religion? That is impossible; for their births, marriages and deaths, they will want to adopt some form of worship and religious rites; and man is made for God, he needs God, he cannot be satisfied without God.

It is not for us to say what religion you must join; and what religion will give you what you seek. We wish in this letter to place before you what the religion of Jesus Christ *has* done in the past for your brethren who have become Christians.

We have in the Andhra Desa about ten lakhs of Christians. Of these nine and a half lakhs must be people who themselves or through their forefathers were in the so-called Depressed Class groups before they became Christians. What has Christianity done for us who are converts and your brethren?

1. *It has lifted us socially.* We have had educational facilities given us by missions. Adults have learnt to read. Our children live, study, and eat alongside of any who may have come into our religion from any other caste. We have risen in the estimation of other castes because of our education and character. Our original caste and the caste of our forefathers are thus being forgotten. Some of our men are occupying positions as Deputy Collectors, Tahsildars, Sub-Magistrates, Municipal Commissioners, Revenue Inspectors, etc., throughout the Andhra Desa. Most of our pastors and teachers are from our own people; and these have under their care Christian converts from all castes. There are hundreds of Christian pastors and thousands of school-masters all over the country. Converts from the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra castes are taught in Christian schools and are given religious ministrations by converts from the Depressed Classes. These things are not unknown to you.

2. *It has raised our womanhood.* The Christian women stand higher than Hindus in education. In English education they stand highest among Indians. Among them are found many Doctors, and B.A.'s who are occupying responsible positions in the Andhra Desa. A few are in Government service. These are respected by all who know them. Infant marriages are unknown among us; purdah is unknown, and this gives our women the opportunity of going on to higher education and making themselves useful in public life. Our

home life is generally known to be pure and happy. Taken as a whole, our women and our girls enjoy life, full life and happiness, because of our religious injunction — one man — one wife, and both equal before God.

3. It has removed the customs and habits that have been the causes of our past degradation.

(a) As we have already said Christian marriage law has given us happy homes. How constantly, among the so-called Depressed Class people, men took liberty to give up one wife and take another without making any provision for the first wife? It was possible, too, for a man to take more than one wife. The result of this was unhappy homes, wrecked lives, bitter tears, quarrels, and sometimes even murders. All this has now changed.

(b) The Christian religion has combated the curse of drink. There is no doubt that one reason for the poverty of the laboring classes is that half the earnings of men is usually wasted on drink. Drink has also led to quarrels, riots, and court cases. Christianity has opposed this; and we can point out many whole villages from which drink has altogether been driven out. This has in its turn brought prosperity. We know—we can cite names—all over the Andhra Desa, of Christians (who were known formerly as Depressed Classes) who have given up drink, and thus after a short time have been able to pay off old debts, and a little later have been known to possess bullock-carts, and earn an independent livelihood for themselves. Decent houses have been built, and the general level of life raised, after the people became Christians.

(c) Christianity has made the people cleaner. The Christian religion requires us all to meet in our churches every day, and most of all on Sundays, together for the public worship of God. This regular worship of God has inculcated in us habits of cleanliness and self-respect.

(d) Christianity has also improved our intellectual powers. The Christian religion enjoins on all converts a certain amount of knowledge of divine things. As soon as we are enrolled as Christians regular instruction begins. A teacher and his wife are sent to live in our midst, and they guide us to knowledge in divine things. Our Sunday worship includes instruction in religion. As a rule during day time the teacher conducts a school for our children. Men and women and children are thus lifted to a higher level of life; and by daily teaching

and daily lessons, enlightenment in the higher things comes to us and these inevitably lead to enlightenment of mind and advance in general culture. The light of Jesus Christ has shone into our hearts and minds, and is illuminating us. This may be noticed in any village in the Andhra Desa.

(e) Christianity has brought us fellowship and brotherhood. It has treated us with respect, and it has given us *self-respect*. It has never despised us because of our lowly origin, but on the contrary has held us as individuals who are as valuable before God and man as any man of any origin. We believe it has been the working out of the will of God, that probably more than seventy-five per cent of all the great efforts Christian missions have made in the past two centuries, has been for us, the Depressed Classes, for whom previously no one had shown any interest or care. All this has been in accord with the life and character of the Lord Jesus, who said, "I am come to seek and save that which is lost." We, your blood and brethren, can witness to you what a blessing it has been to be "found" of Him.

(f) Best of all, Christianity has given us happiness and joy that can only come by the knowledge that God has forgiven our sins and has made us His children in Christ. We consider this as the foundation cause of all that we have received through this religion. The fact that Jesus Christ died for us makes us hate sin, and live new lives. He lives now and enables us to give up our old bad habits and grow in newness of life. "If any man is in Christ there is a new creation," say our Scriptures.

All this has not been accomplished through any magic, or done in a day. It has been the result of years of service, patiently and with love poured out for us by thousands of consecrated men and women, both Indian and foreign who have labored to improve our lot. It has been the result of constant teaching, care, and instruction. It has been accomplished moreover, because we ourselves, freed by Christ from chains of ignorance and fear, have found within ourselves new courage, new hope, new strength to struggle upward. It is still a process going on; we are not a finished product (you may no doubt find many faults within us) but no man can deny that we are growing, *moving toward the goal*. If you, like us, should choose Christ in your momentous choice, you will find in Him, not empty words, but an opportunity for an abundant life. "I am come that ye might have life, and that more abundantly."

All over India the Depressed Class people are wistfully looking in every direction for a new religion. We repeat that the decision must be yours. We have placed in the letter what we have tested and found that Christianity is doing today for millions of your brethren. It can do this for you also.

We pray that at this important moment of your history, you may be guided aright.

*We are,
Your fellow-countrymen
who have followed Christ.*

*(Signed, on their behalf, and in their name,
V. S. DORNAKAL.)*

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CHRISTIAN MASS MOVEMENTS IN INDIA, a report by Bishop J. W. Pickett (382 pp. cloth bound), is obtainable from The International Missionary Council, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Price, \$1.00. Also a smaller report, MOVEMENTS OF THE DEPRESSED CLASSES INTO CHRISTIANITY, based on Dr. Pickett's report. Price, 20 cents.

A NOTE OF EXPLANATION

AN ALMOST overwhelming evangelistic opportunity confronts the Christian Churches in India. The Depressed Classes have been awakened, largely as the result of Christian missionary work. The last decennial census of the government shows that members of these Classes have entered the Church at the rate of an average of 10,500 per month. That rate is increasing and it is estimated now to be in excess of 15,000 per month. The appeal of Dr. Ambedkar to these people to renounce Hinduism is only an incident, startling and significant, in what is a greater movement, begun before his appeal and continuing regardless of what his action may be.

What is the response made to this movement by the Indian Christians, on whom primarily rests the burden of bringing the Gospel to these enquiring masses of people? Herein is the answer: an open letter by the Bishop of Dornakal, V. S. Azariah, himself an Indian and the spokesman of the Indian Christians.

To us in North America, this testimony of Christians in India confirms our own faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It also encourages our larger support of Christian missions. Most important of all, it calls us to prayer, for the Churches in India, and for ourselves, that in the day of God's power we may be willing and faithful servants of the Gospel.

A. L. WARNSHUIS,
*Secretary of The International
Missionary Council*

